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HILLTOPICS

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Break out of the bubble with Barbara Ehrenreich's best-selling *Nickel and Dimed*

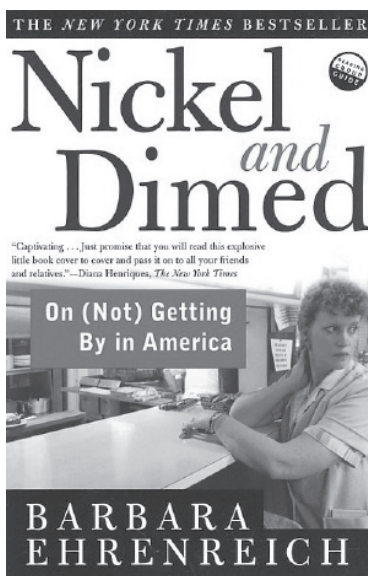
by Rebekah Hurt

Last Monday afternoon, SMU's incoming freshman gathered to participate in a lively campus-wide discussion of the book that many of the university's upper-classmen and faculty members have been buzzing about for the past year: Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. This controversial text consists of a socially sobering but often funny and always readable exposé of Ehrenreich's experiences working "undercover" for minimum wage (or close to it) as a waitress in Florida, a maid in Maine, and then a Wal-mart associate in Minnesota. As an in-road to the consideration of domestic labor policies and, more microscopically, of Dallas' own town-and-gown relations, this is a text that deserves to be perused by the SMU community at large.

I must admit up front that before cracking the book, I was hugely skeptical of Ehrenreich's ability, as a well-off author with a PhD, to convincingly render the hardships of poverty on this experimental basis.

Yet as I read on, I shed my antagonism bit by bit, and grew to tremendously appreciate the study. Ehrenreich does, unavoidably, remain acutely aware of the differences between herself and the people she is impersonating, but as her narrative evolves she juggles her alliances and experiences degrees of crippling anxiety and physical shut-down that she associates with the reality of low-wage life. Ehrenreich, as a temporary member of the working poor, finds, "I need a job and an apartment, but to get a job I need an address and a phone number and to get an apartment it helps to have evidence of stable employment. The only plan I can come up with is to do everything at once" (54). Her several stories indicate that sometimes you get "lucky," but for the most part, "doing everything at once" verges on impossible.

In her eventual conclusion, Ehrenreich powerfully puts to



use a set of national statistics to indicate just how wide-spread are the problems that surface in her anecdotes. She cites government sources that indicate a "living wage" to be "\$30,000 a year for a family of one adult and two children, which amounts to a wage of \$14 an hour [...] The majority of American workers, about 60 percent, earn less than \$14 an hour" (213, emphasis added). Ehrenreich demands that this situation be seen for what it truly is – a state of national emergency. She further surmises (whether correctly or not), that "the appropriate emotion is shame – shame at our own dependency, in this case, on the unpaid labor of others" (221). In any case, what does this mean for the "average" incoming SMU student? The proud SMU moniker for its campus, "The Hilltop," immediately betrays the university's often "bubble"-like qualities – as if the huge, Georgian columns,

spectacular fountains, and compulsively-manicured flower beds (which we all appreciate greatly) were not enough to mark out the school's differences from its urban surroundings. That is not to say that SMU's student body does not *within itself* represent a diverse smattering of economic backgrounds, because it surely does. But regardless of how much change is in your pocket, the mere existence of the "free" time you've spent reading this article testifies to your privileged educational status. So, embody that status conscientiously. Part of the administration's purpose in requiring this new common-reading was to introduce the class of '08 to the types of intellectual discourse that are fostered here.

Hilltopics is pleased to participate in that conscientious conversation: whether you've read the book or just heard about it, write in and tell us how the thoughts *Nickel and Dimed* has provoked can be transformed into practical action on campus.

Rebekah Hurt is a junior English and French major.

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Be Heard: Got an opinion? *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions and interesting feedback. Email your thoughts to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300–600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@hotmail.com by Wednesday at 8:00 PM to be included in the following week's publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in *Hilltopics* are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of *Hilltopics* or any other entity. As such, *Hilltopics* does not publish anonymous articles.

Regardless of political posturing by both parties, John Roberts' confirmation seems a formality

by Michael Hogenmiller

When Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announced that she would be retiring from the court back in July, many were surprised that the announcement wasn't coming from an ailing Chief Justice, whose medical problems had been widely reported in the media.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle dug in for what was sure to be another political battle over a conservative Bush nomination, and political news shows reintroduced coverage of the 'nuclear option' and the bipartisan 'gang of 14.' The impending political battle never materialized.

When John Roberts was named as O'Connor's successor, a group called NARAL Pro Choice America ran an ad campaign claiming that Roberts supported the bombing of abortion clinics. The commercial stated that Roberts had "filed court briefs supporting violent fringe groups and a convicted court bomber." Surely this would promise immediate political bloodshed, right? The commercial practically placed the bomb in Roberts' hands while young mothers-to-be received counseling on pregnancy options.

The campaign backfired violently, as it should have, and advocates both for and against abortion denounced the inuendo created by the commercials. Senator Arlen Specter, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a rare pro-choice Republican wrote a scathing letter to the organization that demanded the commercial be taken off the air because of the harm and embarrassment it caused for the pro-choice movement. The group quickly canceled the remaining run of the campaign.

After the NARAL campaign, Senate Democrats drafted few official criticisms of Roberts. Instead, they are calling on an 'honest look at John Robert's record,' which they say is

made harder by the Bush administration's refusal to release some documents from the nominee's work as a lawyer for the GOP.

One month and over 75,000 released documents later, John Robert's upcoming confirmation hearings are sizing up to be a political formality. Though Roberts has taken professional stances on school prayer, gay rights, the environment, and several other key political issues while working as a D.C. lawyer, how can anyone really know how Roberts will conceive his own role on the Court until the robes come on and he can begin to piece together his jurisprudence, case by case.

Liberal political groups have shown distress towards Democrats on Capitol Hill over the lackluster opposition to Roberts. Many worry that a mild opposition to the nomination will signal a change in approach to reviewing Supreme Court nominees, essentially a truce in which ideology is taken off the table when considering a justice. Democrats, on the other hand, are concerned that a strong opposition to Roberts could damage the party and instead are focusing on fulfilling their role in the constitutional procedures of the confirmation with dignity while stressing important party values.

Like I said, a political formality.

Michael Hogenmiller is a senior political science and music major.

SMU RIDES returns to Hilltop as an option for students concerned about drinking and driving

by Dawn Jenkins

Upperclassmen may remember RIDES with a mixture of emotions. Some students remember fondly (if not so well) the night they dialed the hotline for a free ride home after a rollicking good time out on Greenville Avenue. Other more jaded students may remember the night when a mix-up left them stranded and searching for their cab. And others (the more clueless among us) may mumble, "RIDES was shut down? No wonder they didn't answer my calls," or even ask, "What the heck is SMU RIDES?" Freshmen, your slate is clean, so here's the skinny to get you back up to speed.

After a long battle with the powers that be and much hard work from all involved, SMU RIDES has finally returned from a year-long hiatus with a new contract, a new cab company, and a new lease on life. The im-

proved RIDES program is still free and anonymous, but for liability reasons, no longer referred to as "safe." While the university won't guarantee your safety, Executive Taxi promises to guarantee your satisfaction. No more scrambling for the exact address of that bar you just left - club names or cross streets will suffice. And no more waiting around for your cab - RIDES will have its own fleet of designated drivers at your disposal ready to answer the call. Finally, SMU RIDES has no connection whatsoever to the campus police.

So what does this mean for you, the average blue-blooded SMU student? If you are ever stuck in Dallas without transportation, whether from intoxication or less-than-perfect planning, RIDES is your last resource. It's your sure thing when all other options have failed. The bottom line is that SMU students should have no excuse to drive drunk. Before you drink and drive, consider what the university has done for you and take advantage of the program that is funded by your own Student Senate (read: your money).

Even if you never call SMU RIDES yourself, take comfort in the fact that when fewer students are driving drunk, the streets are safer - or, "friendlier" - for all of us. Watch for more details as the SMU RIDES sponsor, Alpha Phi Omega, prepares to re-launch the program on September 1st.

Dawn Jenkins is a senior international studies and French major.



Despite largely uninteresting hype, this NFL season could have some interesting division races

by Douglas Hill

I'm tired of hearing about Ricky Williams. I'm tired of hearing about Tom "Dynasty" Brady. And I'm definitely tired of hearing about Terrell Owens. But there's still so much to be excited about in the coming NFL season that I promise not to mention any of those tired subjects for the rest of this article.

NFC – The best thing about the NFC is that anything can happen. In the conference with twice the rivalries and half the talent, late-season division games are the most important, as they matter both in the standings and for momentum.

NFC EAST – The wide receivers who finished camp with the Eagles have a total of 27 NFL receptions between them. With Todd Pinkston's health problems and you-know-who's mental health problems, this division could be wide open. Wide open, that is, if the other teams weren't Dallas, New York, and Washington. Sorry Cowboys fans, Philly's still the best team here. By far. Division champ: Philadelphia.

NFC NORTH – The Lions have used two straight first-round picks to draft wide outs named Williams, and they're hoping that with those two young targets, fans will see a few more Joey Harrington passes end up in the arms of Detroit receivers, as opposed to opposing defensive backs. Brett Favre is desperate for a Super Bowl run in what

is probably his last year, and Minnesota has an explosive offense. This division is up in the air, but I'd be a fool to bet against Brett Favre. Division champ: Green Bay.

NFC SOUTH – Two words: Michael Vick. Division champ: At-

lanta.

NFC WEST – Does anyone really care who wins this race to the bottom? The only thing we know for sure is that someone will win this division, and that they probably won't have a winning record. Division champ: What the hell...Arizona.

Wild Cards: Detroit, Carolina

AFC – The AFC is where you'll find all the talent, all the momentum, and all the close division races, so don't hold me to any of these predictions.

AFC EAST – Remember last year? And the year before that? And the year before that? Yeah...they're only getting better. Division champ: New England.

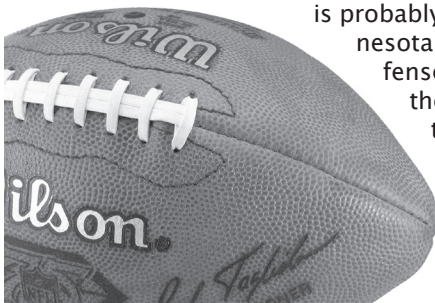
AFC NORTH – Ben Roethlisberger is going to lose an NFL start. I just don't think it's going to be anytime soon. Division champ: Pittsburgh.

AFC SOUTH – I know Peyton Manning is the next Joe Montana. I know Tony Dungy's has proven himself over and over again. And I know Houston has never finished above .500. But the Texans have some of the best young talent in the league at running back, quarterback, and wide receiver, and they play Indy twice in 4 weeks. If they can muster a win or two, this could be their year. Still, I'm not crazy; division champ: Indianapolis.

AFC WEST – This is to the rest of the league what the AFC is to the NFC: more competitive, more talented, and more interesting. Any of these four teams could be the team to end this dynasty jibber-jabber, and I'm betting on Kansas City. The offense is still arguably the best in football, and they added Patrick Surtain and Sammy Knight in the secondary and Derrick Johnson at LB. With an added sense of urgency in what is probably coach Dick Vermeil's last season, this could be the Chiefs' year. Division champs: Kansas City.

Wild Cards: San Diego, Houston

Douglas Hill is a junior international studies major.



Students offered chance to gain a global prospective through SMU study abroad programs

by Kasi DeLaPorte

When I was a first-year student, studying abroad was merely a passing thought. The costs of the programs seemed prohibitive, and the idea of spending weeks or months in another country was too overwhelming when I'd just moved away from home. After some time at SMU, however, I changed my mind. This summer, I spent five weeks in London, and the decision to go was one of the best I've made.

Real-world experience is a necessary complement to classroom instruction. Studying abroad allows you to see things from a perspective the Hilltop can't offer. You learn by walking down streets and driving through the countryside. You encounter potential careers by visiting companies and talking with professionals. You go beyond textbooks and out of classrooms. The result is a valuable educational experience that will benefit you for years to come.

The opportunity to travel is one all students should experience. Living abroad forces you to be responsible and independent in unfamiliar territory. It expands your horizons and strengthens your knowledge of different cultures, showing you what life is like outside the SMU bubble and around the world. Considering the precarious nature of current international relations, it's good to get past powerhouse America,

even temporarily, and challenge yourself to see things from another point of view.

During our short stay in London, SMU students were part of history being made. We were on a train during the terrorist bombings that killed 52 people and injured hundreds. We stood in Hyde Park for Live 8, the first global concert in 20 years to initiate poverty awareness, held in conjunction with the G8 Summit. And we also took part in citywide festivities to celebrate London's victory over New York and Paris in the 2012 Olympic bid competition. All of these events have worldwide impact, but had I been sitting at home this summer, they would have barely touched me.

If you're wondering whether or not you should study abroad sometime during your four years, I say go for it. SMU has summer, semester, and yearlong programs all over the world, and scholarships are available. The experience will break you out of your comfort zone; it might be a challenge, but it's incredibly rewarding.

For more information, visit <http://www.smu.edu/study-abroad/> and attend the Study Abroad Open House in September.

Kasi DeLaPorte is a senior advertising and journalism major.

Politicians and public voice their opinions on various global issues related to G8 summit

From July 6th to 8th, heads of state representing the U.S., Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Russia convened in Scotland for the biennial G8 Summit.

On another front, the Live 8 concerts held around the world engaged dozens of celebrities and millions of civilian attendees in the building dialogue regarding possible correspondence (as well as conflicts) between "the War on Terror" and a "war" on global poverty. Of course, not everyone was particularly enthusiastic about the particular brand of global change and togetherness that Bono and/or Bush were offering. On July 5th, some 100 protesters were sent to court, with hundreds more demonstrating the following days. However disruptive, these gestures paled in comparison to the two days of deadly terrorist attacks on the London transit system. While devastating, these events were ultimately unable to derail discussions of the summit's central topics of concern: among them, the much-publicized matter of African relief and the issue of global climate change.

Calls for reformed environmental policies continued to prove controversial throughout the summit. Entering the conference, the United States remained the only G8 power refusing to ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. British Prime Minister Tony Blair predicted that, without U.S. participation in an environmental agreement, "We will never ensure that the huge emerging economies – particularly those of China and India, who are going to consume more energy than any other part of the world – we will

never ensure that they are part of a dialogue." The U.S. was slow to make progress in this area, although future meetings on the environmental issue are scheduled to take place in Britain this November.

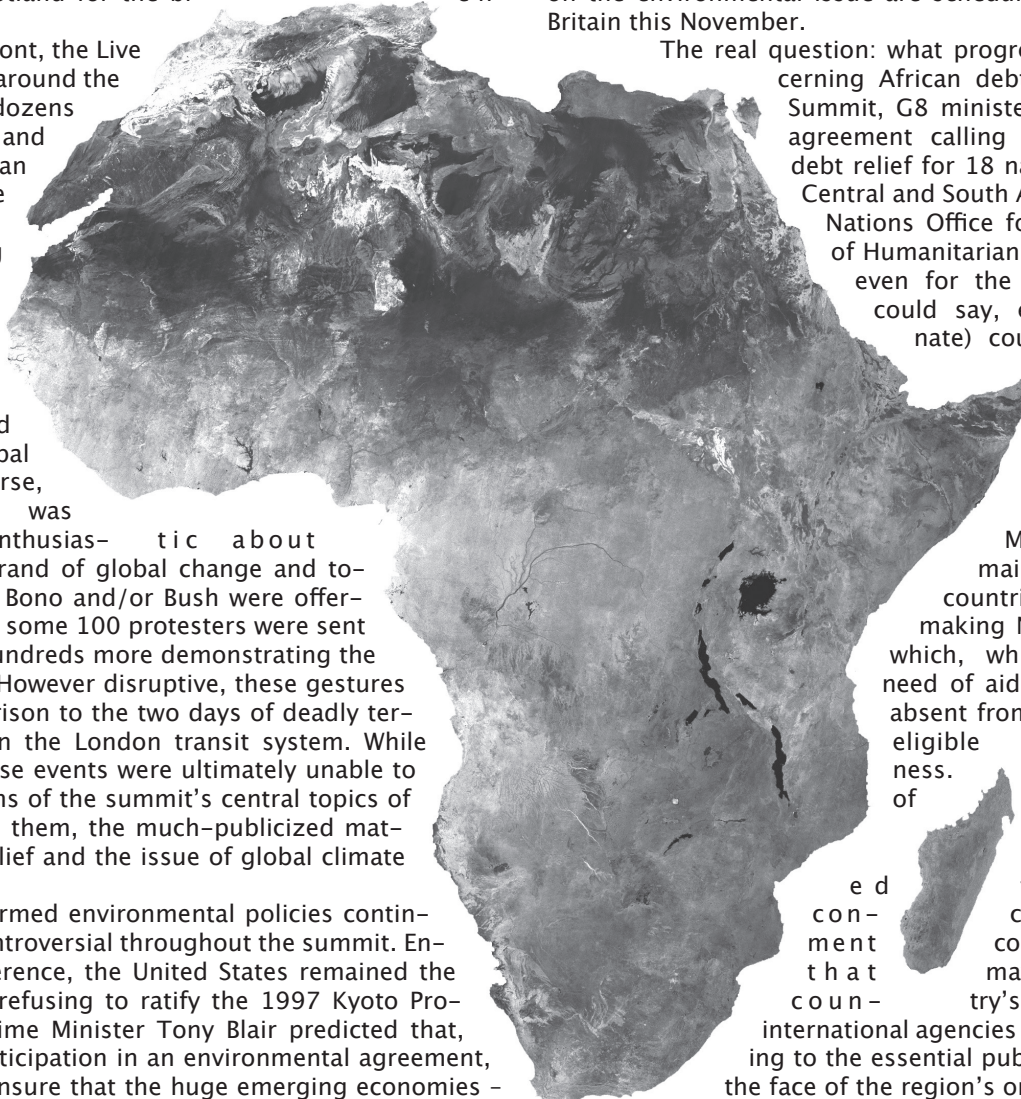
The real question: what progress was made concerning African debt relief? Before the Summit, G8 ministers had outlined an agreement calling for comprehensive debt relief for 18 nations in Africa and Central and South America. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that even for the fortunate (or, one could say, extremely unfortunate) countries included in

this list, such as Niger, the agreed upon donations may still not be enough to meet immediate needs.

Meanwhile, there remain numerous African countries, such as news-making Nigeria and Malawi, which, while in tremendous need of aid, remain noticeably absent from the list of nations eligible for debt forgiveness. In the first week of August, senior U.N. adviser Jeffrey Sachs asserted that, regardless of concerns about government corruption in Malawi may have hindered the country's eligibility for aid,

international agencies should be responding to the essential public need for food in the face of the region's ongoing drought and worst harvests in over a decade.

Rebekah Hurt is a junior English and French major.



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